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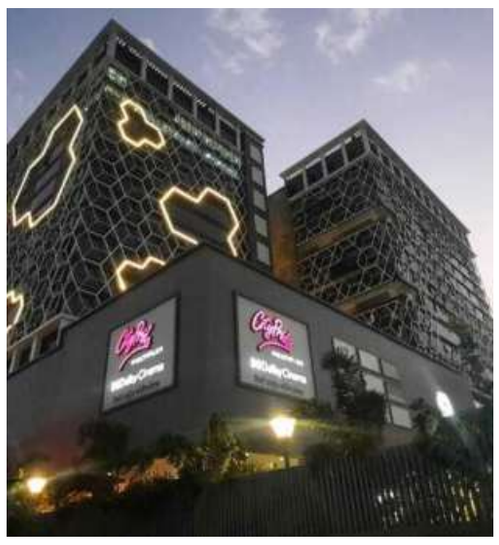

(Clockwise from right) Pune's City Pride Multiplex, which has India's first Dolby Cinema; an LED-based system at AAA Cinemas in Hyderabad; fans at a first day-first show viewing of Rajinikanth's *Coolie* in a Mumbai cinema hall; and the audience at City Pride. (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT, GETTY IMAGES)

FIXING THE LIGHT BULB

Despite having over 9,000 screens and enough content to fill cinema halls, India is still far from achieving international-level picture and sound. And there's plenty to blame, from outdated lamp projectors to exhibitors cutting costs

Vinay Aravind

Two of the world's biggest film festivals – in Venice and Toronto – have just concluded, where filmmakers and film lovers alike have experienced the very best of cinema exhibition. Those from India will now have to return home and resign themselves to the sub-par experience of watching movies in our cinema theatres, and the contrast will likely be stark. Here, many a time the picture is dim, dull and washed out. If you haven't noticed this yet, keep an eye out the next time.

Going to the cinema is a bit like going to church. The cool dark auditorium, the towering screen, the hushed silence, all make for an immersive, almost spiritual process. This also means that short of something egregious, you're unlikely to question the nature of the experience, apart from grumbling about the price of popcorn.

"I often find that a movie I've seen in the hall looks much better on OTT – the colours, the light and shadow, the details," says acclaimed film critic Baradwaj Rangan. "People talk about the big screen experience but why will you go for the big screen when the quality is so poor? I can get a much better picture at home!"

The grim state of the movie-watching experience comprises many elements, ranging from high ticket prices and increasingly smaller screens, to sound leakage from the next auditorium, but for this article, the focus is on projection. There are roughly 9,000 screens across the country and, inevitably, there is a wide range in the quality one encounters. The venues that deliver the highest standards of projection are few and far between. For a country obsessed with cinema, this is a glaring drawback.

Fading lamp projectors

The beating heart of the cinema theatre is the projector, a big, bright, light-emitting machine that throws the image onto the screen. The current crop of digital projectors can broadly be divided into two types, the older ones that use lamps as a light source, and the newer ones that use laser beams to project the image. The vast majority of theatres in India still use lamp projectors.

"Lasers are 20%-25% more expensive and far more recent compared to lamp projectors," says Senthil Kumar, co-founder of Qube Cinema, a leading provider of digital cinema solutions (including projectors) in India. "So, laser projectors will be a very small percentage in India, maybe 10%-15%".

I remember watching the Mammooty-starrer *Bramayugam* (2024) at a nearby multiplex in Chennai. The black-and-white film, a folk horror-thriller set in 17th century Malabar, is a visual masterpiece in monochrome, with the blacks and whites and the contrast between them crucial to the experience. But when the film started to play, everything just looked dull and grey. I was wondering if this was a deliberate choice from the filmmakers, so once I got home I checked the trailer of the movie on my phone. I was shocked to realise it looked completely different. I felt cheated.

Shehnad Jalal, the cinematographer of *Bramayugam*, agrees. "It's a nightmare for many cinematographers to see their film in the theatres. The brightness is low, the contrast is not there, sometimes the frame itself is cropped. These days, once the movie is out of post-production, it's mainly at film festivals that we get to see it the way we intended."

There are a few reasons for this kind of sub-par projection. At the core of this is the light source in most of these projectors, the lamp. These lamps steadily lose brightness as they age, and have a lifespan of a few months. Replacing the lamp can cost up to ₹50,000 depending on the model, and the theatre will have to do this for each screen, every few months. "Towards the end of its life, the lamp will start to deteriorate, and it won't be able to provide full brightness any more. A little before that point, one must replace it. But theatres may wait till the lamp totally fades away," says Kumar of Qube.

Even a ₹10,000 Android phone has a good, bright screen. So the public has a better idea now, of how a picture ought to look

MANESH MADHAVAN
Cinematographer *(Ela Veezha Poonchira, 2022)*

Compromising on brightness

Some exhibitors have been known to cut costs in other ways, too. One of them is to run the projector at a lower brightness, to prolong the life of the lamp. "Often, on the day of a movie's release, they will run the lamp with good brightness," says Sathesh Thulasi, associate vice president at Qube. "Then gradually they will decrease it."

Recently, Kushan Patel, a film enthusiast and communications professional in Vadodara, went for a show of the blockbuster *Sinners* (2025), headlined by Michael B. Jordan, at his local multiplex, and noticed the projection was too dim. He rounded up some fellow viewers and complained to the manager. "After some denial and protests, they agreed and restarted the film with better brightness," says Patel.

Theatre owners are probably banking on the fact that viewers won't notice the difference. In the course of researching this article, I found that was indeed the case. Rather than dwell on the picture quality – or the lack thereof – the average viewer doesn't seem to think there is much of a problem in theatres. That said, some film technicians are optimistic about the situation slowly changing. "Even a ₹10,000 Android phone has a good, bright screen. So the public has a better idea now, of how a picture ought to look," says Manesh Madhavan, the cinematographer behind the atmospheric Malayalam film *Ela Veezha Poonchira* (2022).

It's a nightmare for many cinematographers to see their film in the theatres. The brightness is low, the contrast is not there, sometimes the frame itself is cropped. It's mainly at film festivals that we get to see it the way we intended

SHEHNAD JALAL
Cinematographer (*Bramayugam*, 2024)

Standardisation needed

Technicians have always railed against the poor quality of projection in theatres in India. In the days of film, the understanding was that theatres in 'A centres' – the big cities – would run their projectors bright, while B and C centres (smaller towns and villages) were known to run their projectors dimmer to cut costs. "So when they made prints for the A centres, they would make it correctly, for B centres they would make it one stop brighter, and for C centres they'd do two stops brighter, to try and compensate for the projection loss," says Jalal.

With the advent of digital projection, those old equations are out of the window. You can encounter bad, dim projection in both cities and villages now. "When Ang Lee watched his film *Life of Pi* [2012] at Sathyam Cinemas in Chennai, he remarked that it was probably the best projection he'd seen," says Devanshu Arya, a Chennai-based filmmaker, about the cinema theatre which was subsequently acquired by multiplex chain PVR-INOX. "But now the quality at Sathyam has deteriorated so much," he adds.

PVR was at the forefront of the multiplex revolution in India, establishing the first multiplex in 1997 in New Delhi. As of December 2024, the merged entity of PVR-INOX operates 1,749 screens across 355 properties in 111 cities across India and Sri Lanka. When we reached out to them with queries about the number of laser projectors in their venues or the quality of projection, PVR-INOX declined to comment. Cinepolis, possibly the second largest exhibitor in India, operates 449 screens. We reached out to them too with similar queries, but did not hear back at the time of going to press.

And yet, while the picture quality remains inconsistent, exhibitors are happy to spend on ostentatious interiors, recliner seats, gourmet food, and other bells and whistles. "Many theatres now have different priorities, they want to provide luxury amenities, but they don't care about the core aspects of the experience," says cinematographer Madhavan.

"Standardisation is what is needed," adds S. Radhakrishnan, award-winning audiographer and sound engineer at the Kerala State Films Development Corporation, which runs 17 screens in the State. "Cinematographers and exhibitors' associations all need to come together to put a system in place that will make sure that these films, which are made with so much effort and care, are presented to the viewers in the correct manner."

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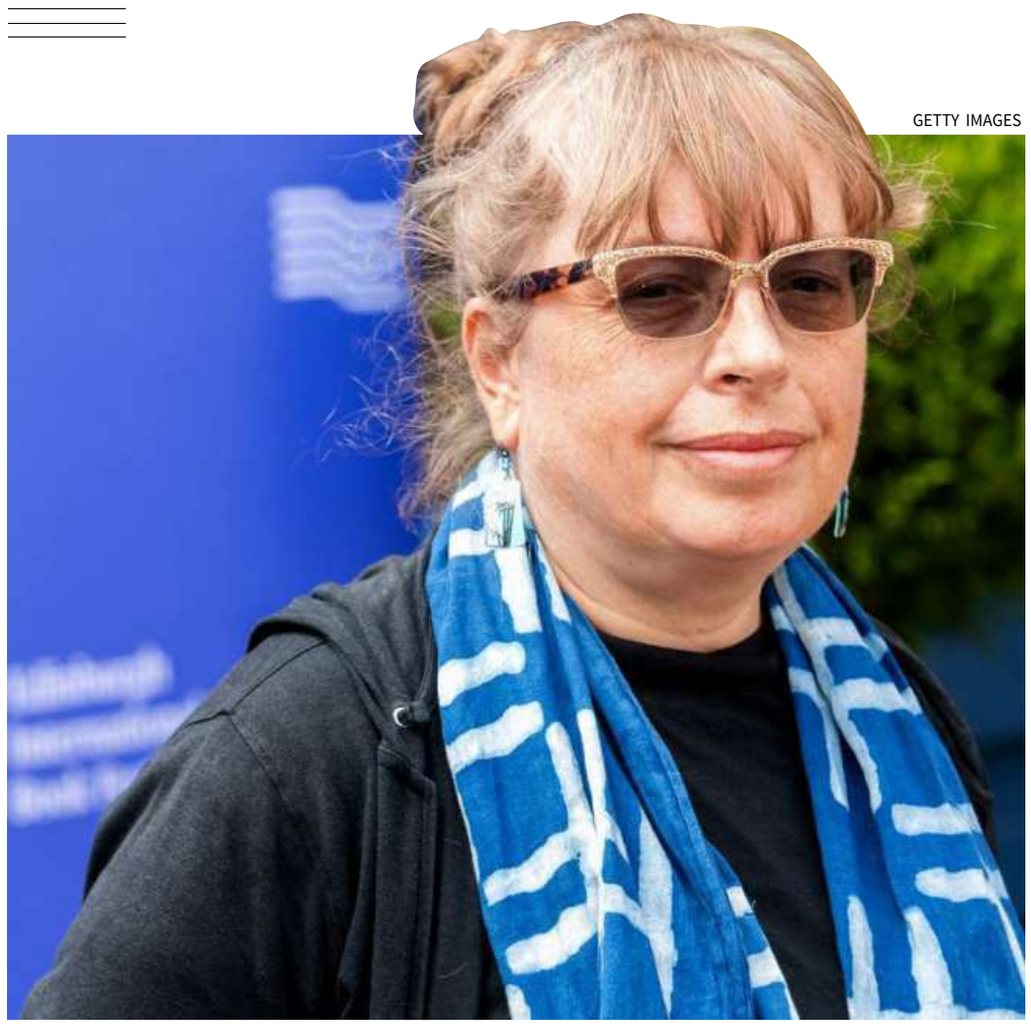


GETTY IMAGES

DAISY ROCKWELL HAS CHUTZPAH

The International Booker-winning translator makes a bold literary decision in her new novel, a "gripping" family saga straddling continents

Jerry Pinto

There are two kinds of books in which people see ghosts and we must take them seriously: the first is the ghost story, an old and wonderful form; and there is the magical realist book where phantasmas and revenants may mingle with the living. Daisy Rockwell places her book, *Alice Sees Ghosts*, in the realist tradition – we are told when the protagonist Alice brushes her teeth and the colour of her nightgown as she squats in the garden – but she sees her dead grandfather in his wing of the family home.

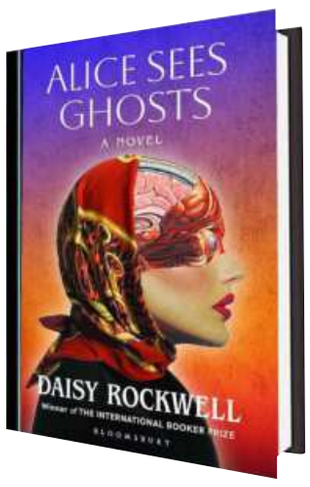
This reveals itself as a plot device soon enough. The young woman must be led to discover her grandfather's other family in Mussoorie and so she dutifully comes to India with her fiancé, Ronit Roy, a psychiatrist and first-generation American citizen. Her grandfather turns up there as well but adds nothing more to the story. He could have written Alice a letter but so much more atmospheric to come back and look through an atlas in one's old home.

A double-edged sword

To make such a literary decision takes chutzpah, a Yiddish word that could have only been born in the U.S. It is chutzpah that allows the citizens of that country to call themselves Americans when they share the North American continent with 22 other independent countries. It is chutzpah that puts 'Winner of the International Booker Prize' under Rockwell's name on the cover of this book. (If you are wondering what author Geetanjali Shree, co-winner of the Prize, thinks of it, flip the book over. She writes that the book is "a gripping saga that excavates the dark, all-too-human secrets of a family straddling two continents...")

Early in the book, on the first page, we are warned that Alice speaks with "precise diction and elaborate sentence structures" due to "a lengthy spell, now over, of speaking not at all, or only rarely". (Again, I found no trace of this thereafter. She seemed to speak in the ordinary Novelese, the special language that we novelists have invented for our characters who never stumble, never stutter, and only occasionally say something like 'Of why?' as Alice does.) The aphasia was what brought her serendipitously to meet Dr. Roy, who falls in love with her non-ness.

This non-ness is a double-edged sword. It can either leave readers hanging over an abyss or it can allow them to fill in the empty space with their own responses and reactions. Alice's non-ness can be tracked back to her mother, Clare, a narcissistic alcoholic who throws tantrums when her daughter wants to get a job. Thus drifting, we meet Alice at the bedside of her grandmother, Nanette – a veritable *House of Bernarda Alba* this – who is dying slowly while her mother drinks angrily in another room.



Alice Sees Ghosts
Daisy Rockwell
Bloomsbury
₹699

Stating the obvious

Nanette's death unmoors the large family, uncles with rich names like Stormton play walk-on roles at a Christie-esque reading of the will. Alice is left in charge of the family fortune but she doesn't ask how much it is and whether it will suffice for her and for the rest of the family who have been used to handouts from the matriarch.

Perhaps she is too distracted by the ghost she has seen. She arrives in Kolkata, in the middle of a flood, where she is immured with Dr. Roy's father, a Bengali English Literature professor of few words (!) who has also the good fortune of talking to his dead father. Only the senior Roy provided useful information: where the property papers were buried – but not much else. He was another Bengali gent of few words.

But then this is a clever inversion. Alice, U.S.-born, is a drifter; Ronit Roy, Bengali boy, is the driven achiever who gets a medical degree. Alice sees ghosts; Ronit is the rationalist. You have been warned again.

Does Rockwell rock well? Well enough. She could have done with a little editing. There are at least two scenes where Alice or Ronit tells us what we have already been told. There is not much new information added nor are we invited to a game of Chinese whispers, watching the words being mangled. But to balance that off, there are two scenes which belie the bloodlessness of the Bostonian (or near Bostonian) bluebloods: they involve theft, vomit and screaming. And Rockwell allows us to enjoy them without comment.

The reviewer is a poet and novelist.

A river runs through it all

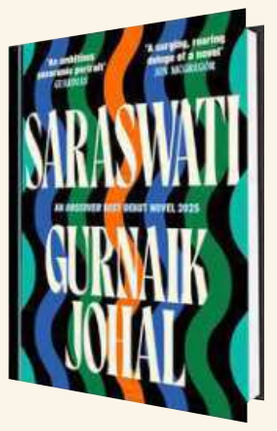
In giving a potted history of various issues, the narrative in this ambitious debut novel ends up feeling distant

Sheila Kumar

Gurnaik Johal's debut novel *Saraswati* is audacious in scope and epic in scale. The resurgence of that ancient mythical river, the Saraswati, is braided here with the individual stories of characters, all of whom are part of one extended family. Multiple narratives across different continents deal with varied themes ranging from eco-terrorism to hate crimes, right-wing politics, and much else.

Like the intricate embroidery in a *phulkari* dupatta, which plays an important part in this tale, a family's origin story takes shape. The story begins with Satnam returning from the U.K. to his ancestral farm for his grandmother's funeral. This coincides with the discovery of water in a dead well, which is taken as a sign of the return of the river Saraswati. As the river is imbued with historical and religious significance, all kinds of people descend on Satnam's farm. Soon a nationalist agenda takes root; holy men, politicians, archaeologists all work to serve the agenda. Satnam, a bit adrift, finds himself getting embroiled in unpleasant ways.

The chapters alternate between the past in 19th century Punjab, and the present. An inter-caste marriage takes place back in those times. In the present, we meet a diverse cast of characters: a musician, an archaeology professor, an entomologist, a hustler who also manages the social media feed of a famous musician, a stuntman. They will turn out to be descendants of the inter-caste couple, distant cousins all. Contact is established and some sort of relationship is forged.



Saraswati
Gurnaik Johal
Serpent's Tail
₹699

Familiar events

Placing the cousins in different occupations affords the writer room to highlight various concerns. We see an eco-terrorist group planning an attack, and the unfortunate consequences of actions that are deemed justified play out here. Climate change and its effects come into focus in the work of the entomologist. The use of archaeologists to further a jingoistic programme is touched upon.

Threaded through all the different stories is the way in which a nationalist right-wing government works on the myth of unearthing a lost river to consolidate power. An alternate history takes shape and in short order, becomes the norm. There is much propaganda. Grandiose plans are made. A whole new shining city is built. Elections are won on the basis of the religious fervour thus engendered.

Some of the characters will find their lives impacted by the unfolding events, all of them will finally gather at a celebration in the new city built by the government. This then, will lead to a tragedy familiar from news headlines. But all will not be lost.

There is ambition in the telling of this story but it is told in a distant manner, so the reader does not feel too invested. In giving a potted history about the various issues, there tends to be too much exposition. It is the story of the inter-caste couple that remains affecting. The *qisse* (stories) of Punjab and the story of the *phulkaris* is incorporated in the larger picture in a clever way. This Observer Best Debut Novel of 2025 is both an engaging and promising work.

The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based author, journalist and manuscript editor.

Bengaluru chronicles

Sundar Sarukkai's new novel is a loud affirmation that a city has its own language

Stanley Carvalho

Bengaluru's dramatic change from a sleepy, 'Garden City' to a bustling tech city over the last few decades has seen, among others, the rise of a multicultural population, increasingly diverse in terms of ethnicity, language and religion.

Philosopher and writer Sundar Sarukkai's second novel *Water Days* is a reflective look at the changes in his home city; how everyday life gets formed and what happens to the city insidiously and quietly.

He explores migration and the changing social fabric, patriarchy, language, linguistic conflicts, power and who gets to belong in the melting pot that is Bengaluru.

The story is set in the late 1990s in Mathikere, a working-class neighbourhood in north Bengaluru, comprising locals and migrants from across India, giving it a cosmopolitan character. Mathikere, in many ways, epitomises similar areas of the Karnataka capital reshaped by the winds of change.

Sarukkai's story is set in a working-class neighbourhood comprising locals and migrants from across India, giving it a cosmopolitan character. (GETTY IMAGES)

Lost innocence

The narrative revolves around the protagonist Raghavendra, a former security guard, now aspiring detective with dreams of starting a grocery store. He lives with his wife, two daughters and two paying guests – one from Bihar and the other from Tamil Nadu.

The untimely demise of a teenage girl causes a sense of disquiet in the neighbourhood. Tasked by his wife, Raghavendra assumes the role of detective to unravel the mystery behind the death. But, with many captivated by this incident, and working through a complicated set of circumstances, including language, class, fear and police indifference, the search for truth is an uphill battle. His relentless pursuit leads him to not only the shocking revelation about the teenager's death but also the death of the city's simple and uncorrupted past: "Their lives only reflected the violent changes in the city, changes that would irrevocably erase the age of innocence in the life of Bangalore."

Water Days
Sundar Sarukkai
Tranquebar
₹499

Dynamic narrative

It is not just the title but 'water' is a recurrent element in the story, a metaphor for air, for life and more. It is around the public taps of the area that women gather before dawn to fill their pots and vessels; a daily ritual for survival, to socialise, trade gossip, even squabble. In the final denouement, the women, on the 13th day when the soul finds liberation, assemble around the public tap in an extraordinary display of solidarity and power.

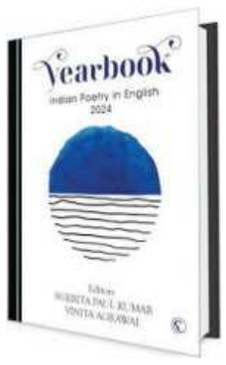
The tragic death, the rumours, the red herrings, the investigation and resolving the mystery not only infuse a touch of a whodunnit but lend dynamism to the narrative.

If Sarukkai's debut work of fiction *Following a Prayer* (2023) was about belief and life itself and the truth of the story lay in its silence, *Water Days* is a loud affirmation that a city has its own language and it is not the language that the people in the city speak. It is sensorial, "in the way rain falls on crooked tin sheets, in the sound of sliding slippers on slushy roads, the musky sound of breathing dogs, the clatter of vegetable carts, the crumpled sound of a bitten puff by hungry teeth".

The reviewer is a Bengaluru-based independent journalist.

BROWSER

Yearbook: Indian Poetry in English 2024



Ed. Sukrita Paul Kumar and Vinita Agrawal
Pippa Rann Books U.K.
₹499
Put together after a blind selection of poetry by writers of Indian origin, the verses in this collection include a mix of debut voices and celebrated names.

A Kind of Meat and Other Stories

Catherine Thankamma
Aleph
₹699
Recipient of the Crossword Book Award 2011, the author and translator based in Kochi puts forth a provocative collection that highlights the burden of women living in a conservative and hypocritical society.

Days at the Torunka Cafe

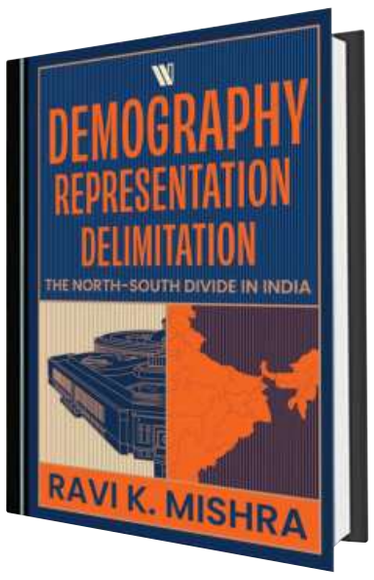
Satoshi Yagisawa
Bonnier Books U.K.
₹399
Yagisawa crafts poignant tales of hope found and lost. Following his award-winning debut *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop*, which earned him the Chiyoda Literature Prize, his new book is set in a quiet cafe in Tokyo.

What We Can Know

Ian McEwan
Jonathan Cape
₹899
This genre-defying novel spans the years 2014 to 2119 in a world reshaped by rising seas. A great lost poem, revelations of entangled love and a brutal crime are among the themes explored here by the winner of the 1998 Booker Prize.

THE POPULATION CHALLENGE

Are southern States justified in saying they are being penalised for successful population control? A new book joins the delimitation debate



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Sonalde Desai

With the announcement of the 2027 Census, a new political season has begun. The 42nd and 84th constitutional amendments froze parliamentary seat allocation to the State population based on the 1971 Census until after 2026. This freeze was enacted to eliminate electoral disincentives for States to limit population growth. Census 2027 will provide an opportunity for re-examining delimitation.

It is in this context that the book, *Demography, Representation, Delimitation: The North-South Divide in India,* by historian Ravi K. Mishra, joint director at the Prime Minister's Museum and Library, takes on added significance. He argues that "the continued use of the 1971 Census for seat allocation in Parliament and fiscal devolution, as demanded by many leaders from the south, lacks empirical, political and democratic justification."

Main contentions

Using data from population censuses from 1881 to 2011, this book makes three major arguments. First, it contends that demographic growth in northern States is greater than that in the southern States is an overstatement if we focus on the long span rather than recent decades. Drawing on the work of demographer Tim Dyson, it argues that different regions of the country have experienced population growth at varying periods in history.

Demographic transition first occurred in the south and later in the north, resulting in increasing share of the south in overall population in the first half of the 20th century before the northern States caught up

The Demographic Transition - a movement from high fertility and mortality to low fertility and mortality - is accompanied by a surge in population due to a lag between the two. Demographic transition first occurred in the south and later in the north, resulting in increasing share of the south in overall population in the first half of the 20th century before the northern States caught up.

The 1971 Census took place at a time when the population share of Bihar had fallen from 8.9% of overall national population to 7.7% while the share of Kerala had risen from 2.7% to 3.9%. In 2011, Bihar's share is 8.6% while that for Kerala is 2.8%. Hence, using a recent Census will return population shares to the period before the demographic transition began.

Narrow focus

Interestingly, the book primarily focuses on Census 2011; however, if we were to use projections from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for 2026, the trend would be intensified, with population shares of 9.3% for Bihar and 2.5% for Kerala, with no end in sight.

The second contention is that the complaint by southern States that they are being penalised for successful population control is unjustified. This contention is made in a somewhat roundabout way by arguing that the fear of population explosion emerged in Western nations and was subsequently grafted onto Indian political discourse, with the expectation that States would implement a strong family planning programme to control population growth. However, according to the book, family planning programmes have played only a limited role in spurring fertility decline. This is a narrow view of the role of state policies in shaping demographic outcomes. Demographic literature has identified mortality decline as one of the primary drivers for spurring fertility decline. When parents can be certain that their children will survive, they are more willing to stop at one or two children and not have additional children as insurance. It is well recognised that States like Kerala managed to reduce infant mortality at relatively low levels of economic development.

The book's third argument deserves the greatest attention. It demonstrates that the current delimitation strategy disenfranchises residents of northern and eastern States by allocating fewer seats to these States than they would be accorded if representation were equal. For example, with equal representation, Bihar would receive 47 Lok Sabha seats instead of the current 40, and Kerala's seats would decrease to 15 from the current 20.

A way out

Here, we come to the crux of the debate. To what extent should political representation be tied to population shares? While ensuring fair representation is important, democratic societies must also seek to balance the rights of minority populations, in this case geographic minorities. A possible strategy may be to decouple the allocation of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha seats. Where Lok Sabha seat allocation may be based on population shares, Rajya Sabha seats could be allocated equally to all States - somewhat analogous to the division between House of Representatives and Senate in the U.S. with the former being based on population share and the latter allocating two senators to each State, regardless of its size.

The book would have been far more valuable if, instead of making a one-sided case for population-based delimitation, it had focused on the delicate balance between geographic and population representation.

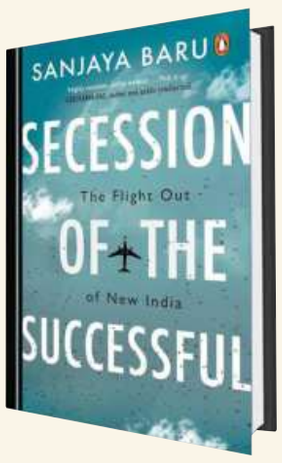
The reviewer is Professor, NCAER, and University of Maryland. Views are personal.

Demography, Representation, Delimitation: The North-South Divide in India
Ravi K. Mishra
Westland Books
₹999

Up and away

Sanjaya Baru on why so many Indians are investing in the destiny of other nations instead of their own

Kallol Bhattacherjee
kallol.b@thehindu.co.in



Secession of the Successful: The Flight Out of New India
Sanjaya Baru
Penguin Viking
₹799

Indians fought a long, hard struggle for freedom to build a State where they would be the masters of their destiny, and yet they have continued to seek their fortunes away from home after Independence. In fact, outmigration has intensified in recent years. Sanjaya Baru's latest offering, *Secession of the Successful: The Flight Out of New India,* chronicles the colonial era outmigration of Indians, but his real focus is on contemporary India and the causes propelling the exodus.

Baru's expansive framing begins in the 19th century when indentured labourers began to work in plantations of British colonies. He rounds it off in the 21st century with the H-1B visa-fuelled gold rush, now in the crosshairs of the Make America Great Again movement in the U.S. He acknowledges the genius of immigrant Indians and the way they have made their mark globally. But why are resident Indians still being pushed to seek greener pastures elsewhere? He feels many Indians are leaving now because they are alienated from the idea of India.

Problems within

Baru does not hesitate to put it in context, pointing out that people are leaving the country also because of political reasons. With multiple examples, the author has shown that instead of identifying the reasons for the growing alienation and restlessness among the youth, the State government and, more importantly, the Centre have started treating immigration and the immigrant Indian success story as something to be proud about. Baru's broad canvas weaves in many aspects of immigration like popular culture. He richly connects family, faith, industry, language, food and various other areas where the interplay of immigration and the home left behind becomes visible. He identifies the appeal of matchmaking among diaspora Indians who despite their hard-earned success have not abandoned a traditional Indian practice as shown in the Netflix TV series *Indian Matchmaking* that highlighted how matchmaking or "arranged marriage" continues in the diaspora in the West and elsewhere. Baru also highlights the conservative nature of India's immigration story where organisations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad have actually reached out to the diaspora with a missionary zeal to turn them into ambassadors of India's Hindu(tva) culture.

The Indian diaspora is becoming both a 'living bridge' as well as a 'challenge' in India's relations with major powers of the world.
(GETTY IMAGES)

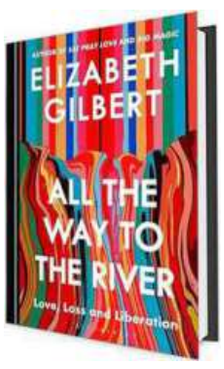
The more problematic side of the Indian immigration story has become prominent in recent years as clashes among communities from India have often been reported like in the case of the 2022 Leicester riots where tension along communal lines reflected the polarised political scenario in post-pandemic India.

A challenge

The irony of diaspora Indians cheering for Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his visits but refusing to return to 'Modi's India' is not lost on Baru. He says their actions betray an enduring lack of confidence in the country they left behind. The Indian diaspora is becoming both a "living bridge" as well as a "challenge" in India's relations with major powers of the world. The Indian state that celebrates success of immigrant Indians with Pravasi Bharatiya Samman has no solution when a successful Indian IT engineer becomes an online troll for regressive ideas and divisive politics. In a world where Kamala Harris and Rishi Sunak are representative figures of success of the diaspora, the Indian government has also acted against the same diaspora's members by cancelling their PIO cards when they are critical of India. Baru's book is a comprehensive and easy-to-read account of the success of Indian immigrants and the complicated relation that they are destined to have with the world.

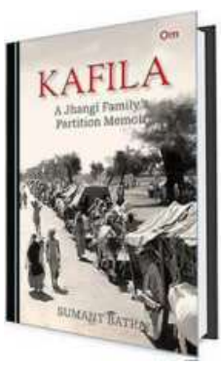
A Short History of the Gaza Strip
Anne Irfan
Simon & Schuster India
₹699
Irfan examines six key moments since 1948 that have brought the region to the present war, exploring several questions. Why has a genocidal violence been unleashed by Israel in Gaza after Hamas-led attacks on October 7, 2023?

All the Way to the River: Love, Loss and Liberation
Elizabeth Gilbert
Bloomsbury
₹699
A quarter of a century ago, Gilbert met Rayya, and they fell in love. They were also a pair of addicts, hurtling towards catastrophe. After Rayya passed away, Gilbert got sober. In this memoir, she tells the story of her own addiction and recovery.



Tangerine: How to Read the Upanishads Without Giving Up Coffee
Namita Devidayal
Westland Books
₹599
Devidayal explores Hindu philosophy, which has "very little connection" to Hindutva, and realises that discovering the inner self, and working towards changing it, is the real purpose of life.

Kafila: A Jhangi Family's Partition Memoir
Sumant Batra
Om Books
₹500
The Partition of 1947 continues to haunt the subcontinent. Batra writes the story of his great-grandfather Tulsi Dass who had to leave Jhang overnight with his family, leaving behind ancestral land.



CONTINUED FROM
» PAGE 1

GETTY IMAGES

FIXING THE LIGHT BULB

Hope and technology

It's not all doom and gloom, though. There are a few exhibitors who care enough to carry out regular maintenance of their projectors. And, there are technological advances that promise a better future.

While lamp projectors are still the vast existing majority, new installations and upgrades are more likely to be laser. Laser projectors are not automatically better, but there is a crucial difference in the economics of operating them.

While a lamp lasts for mere months, the life of a laser can be over 20,000 hours, translating to years of service before any replacement is required. This means there's simply no need to run the projector at a lower brightness. "The cost of the laser projector [₹60 lakh-₹1 crore] is high, but there is no recurring cost. You can keep running it and even after seven years, you can get the same quality as the first show," says Thulasi of Qube.

If you watch a movie in a theatre with a laser screen, chances are you'll get a brighter picture compared to other venues. It's the standard brightness but, unlike the other venues, actually delivered.

If you want to take things up a notch, there are "premium large format" screens like IMAX Laser and Qube's homegrown EPIQ, both of which have a handful of installations across the country.

These formats use state-of-the-art laser projectors and can target a higher brightness, which when combined with the size of these screens can deliver a more impressive and immersive picture.

Sanju Surendran, a filmmaker who lives in the town of Palakkad on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border, says he often travels to Coimbatore to watch films at Broadway Cinemas, a multiplex that has both large format and regular screens. "For movies like *Oppenheimer* and *F1*, I wanted to see them on a good screen, so it was worth it to drive down to Coimbatore. The projection and sound at Broadway are top class. Watching *F1* at their laser IMAX, I really felt like I was sitting in the race car," he says.

Tejal Satish, COO of Broadway Cinemas, explains how they maintain the projection standard: "Every screen is regularly calibrated for brightness, contrast, and colour accuracy. Our engineers follow strict preventive maintenance schedules, checking lenses, porthole glass, servers, and sound alignment before every major release."

Setting new benchmarks

And finally, at the cutting edge are a few next-generation technologies that have made their tentative forays into India, promising a cinematic experience with unprecedented levels of quality. These include Dolby Cinema and HDR by Barco, which are both projection-based systems, and Samsung's Onyx and Qube's EPIQ Luxon, which use giant LED screens instead of projectors.

While they all cost many times what a regular laser projection setup does, and their numbers are small at the moment, perhaps more screens will be installed soon with these technologies?

They promise to set a new benchmark for cinema viewing in the coming years.

Samsung's Onyx was first off the mark in India in 2018 with their LED screens, but their ambitious plans seem to have been stymied by the COVID-19 pandemic. Qube's EPIQ Luxon has a similar LED-based system, which is currently installed in one venue in Hyderabad – AAA Cinemas in Ameerpet. For now, these screens are relatively smaller in size but there is promise of larger installations in the future. That said, LED consumes considerably more power and generates more heat (requiring more powerful air conditioning), so it's unclear if widespread adoption is likely.

Dolby Cinema made its India debut at the City Pride Multiplex in Pune this July. Apart from the greater brightness, it also boasts class-leading levels of contrast, and expertly tuned Dolby Atmos sound. "It is an elevated experience, both in terms of picture and sound," says Girish Mallya, the Mumbai-based editor of a technology magazine. He watched the Brad Pitt-starrer *F1* at City Pride. "What really stood out for me about the projection was the colour gamut and how deep the blacks were," Mallya adds.

The newest player in this space globally is HDR by Barco. The Belgian projector manufacturer uses a patented technology that they call "light steering" to deliver an extremely bright image from a projection setup, with a high dynamic range.

HDR by Barco made its India debut at Sri Melody theatre in Visakhapatnam in May, and I went to watch the Telugu film *Kingdom* there. Even on a weekday morning, the theatre was packed. I sat through the whole show despite not understanding a word, because it was truly the most dynamic and dazzling picture I had seen in any cinema theatre. The brightest parts of the picture were dazzling, and even the darkest of shadows retained a great deal of detail and texture.

Dasari Gowri Shankar, manager of Sri Melody, tells me, "Now, when any movie releases in the city, our screen fills up first because people know that there is something special about the experience."

And this right here is reason for hope. When more and more people start choosing theatres with better projecion, even travelling to a different state for it, perhaps that will serve as a wake-up call for the incumbents to improve their offerings, or risk losing their customers.

The writer and photographer is based in Chennai.

A still from *Ponniyin Selvan: 1.*

SOUND WATCH

The 'loudness war' that's marring the aural experience of watching films in Indian theatres

Tanushree Ghosh
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When Mani Ratnam's *Ponniyin Selvan: I* (2022) brought people back into cinema theatres post-pandemic, the exhibitors complained of low sound. Sound designer Anand Krishnamoorthi, who bagged a National Award for the film, says, "When we sent the mix [at 5.8 instead of the normal 7, done closer to Hollywood's subtler style, by Los Angeles-based sound recording mixer Craig Mann of *Whiplash* fame], they said it sounded like a Hollywood film, not a Tamil one. They claimed it wasn't loud enough – 'with no harsh sounding dialogue [which is more of a cultural expectation mismatch].' When we asked them to play it at the levels they would a Hollywood film, they were reluctant. [Because] in a local film, they expect sharper dialogue to compensate for poor centre tweeters, which in itself is caused by a combination of harsher mixes from the past, and poor maintenance."

When they asked the theatres to play *PS: I* at the levels of a Hollywood film, as intended by the sound mixers, they refused because "it's a Tamil film with Tamil actors". "When theatres get a local film, they need to hear distortion [the physical alteration of a sound wave, something that many South India films do]. It's a cultural block," he adds.

In general, Indian film mixes tend to be much louder than western films, shares L.A.-based Kunal Rajan, the sound designer of Atlee's debut Hindi film *Jawan* (2023), starring Shah Rukh Khan. "The first reason is cultural. Indians generally are a loud people and often more animated compared to Europe or the U.S.," he says. "This energy naturally reflects in our storytelling and, in turn, our sound design. The second reason is technical. Over the last few decades, there has been an ongoing 'loudness war' between creators and exhibitors. Theatres turn down the levels to protect their speakers; sound designers in turn raise the levels on the mix to compensate. Over time, this cycle has made Indian film mixes louder, harsher and less dynamic."

Massy actioners to blame?

We have come a long way from the early surround sound days of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993). Our soundtracks and audio technology have evolved from mono stereo to 5.1 surround sound to Dolby Atmos, which is an industry standard now, equipped in more than 1,000 theatres across India. Atmos sets the playback level limit at 7, which, "unfortunately, is slowly coming down because the content going from the studios is becoming louder", says sound designer Tapas Nayak (*Super Deluxe, Kumbalangi Nights*). Today, more massy actioners are being made in the country, such as *Jaat* or *Animal* in Bollywood, alongside the southern films – often considered among the louder mixes in Indian cinema.

Krishnamoorthi adds, "Film mixes have been standardised, but if a theatre isn't calibrated, the numbers don't mean much. Playing at level 6, for instance, would sound different in different rooms/halls." While Dolby Atmos is a technology upgrade, it "doesn't guarantee calibration and maintenance or playback levels because that's still in the hands of the individual theatres".

But theatres don't have an incentive to do that if the mixes are inconsistent and progressively louder. "A properly calibrated set of speakers will blow if the mix is too hot. So, usually for the first show, the projectionists play it safe and low, and take it up when they learn the mix is safe to play louder. But most films don't last as long in theatres."

Compensating for the yelling

Unlike Hollywood films, which are usually played at the right sound levels because theatre owners know their speakers won't be impacted, when exhibitors receive a Kannada, Telugu, or Tamil film mix, they dial down the sound. "Most of our movies are massy hero films. The audiences scream every time the hero enters, they cheer at his punch lines. [The studios] compensate for the yelling by cranking up the volume," notes Krishnamoorthi.

Rajan recalls receiving varied complaints on Day 1 of *Jawan*'s release from different Mumbai theatres. "One said the dialogue was too low, while the music and effects were fine. Another claimed that they could only hear the dialogue but the music and effects sounded low. Both experiences were completely opposite and, as a sound designer, I didn't know how to react," he states.

While "many multiplexes are not properly acoustically calibrated, the experience is better in suburban single-screen theatres, which tries to stay honest to the mix," says Nayak. For instance, sound designer Nithin Lukose (of upcoming *Jugnuma - The Fable*) recalls being put off at a Mumbai Cinépolis theatre, which had lowered the sound of *Tumbbad* (2018); but he has had good experiences at the Dolby Atmos-equipped single screen in his hometown Wayanad. In fact, Lukose requested *Jugnuma* distributor and filmmaker Raam Reddy to ask theatre technicians for a sound check on its release day on Friday (September 12).

***PS: I* suffered because its sound** mix [at 5.8] wasn't harsh and loud. With *PS: II* [2023, mixed at 5.5], we hit the sweet spot – we didn't compromise on the dynamics, but overall mixed a touch louder. And we didn't face much complaints from the exhibitors

ANAND KRISHNAMOORTHI
Sound designer

A QUIET REBELLION WINS BIG IN VENICE

Director Anuparna Roy breaks new ground at the prestigious film festival with *Songs of Forgotten Trees*

Saibal Chatterjee

Anuparna Roy, winner of the Orizzonti Best Director award at the 82nd Venice Film Festival for *Songs of Forgotten Trees*, a 77-minute film drenched in memories of times past and friends lost, is in august company. She is only the fifth director from the subcontinent, after Satyajit Ray (Golden Lion, *Aparajito*, 1957), Buddhadeb Dasgupta (Special Director Award, *Uttara*, 2000), Mira Nair (Golden Lion, *Monsoon Wedding*, 2001), and Chaitanya Tamhane (Orizzonti Best Film, *Court*, 2014), to bring home a trophy from the world's oldest film festival.

Has the world of the girl from West Bengal's Purulia district changed overnight? "It has," she says. "The award places great responsibility on my shoulders. Every step I take from here on will be watched. I am a bit nervous, but also excited." Roy says the validation for her film from the audience in Venice was extremely encouraging. "It was great to see the film resonate, cutting across geographical, cultural and linguistic barriers. It was particularly special because it is my first film."

Backed by 7 men

The director, who has just stepped into her 30s, is one of several Indian women who have, of late, broken into the international film circuit, with a few going on to bag major awards. Roy has joined a small but exclusive club of Indian filmmakers – Payal Kapadia, who has triumphed twice at Cannes (the Golden Eye for *A Night of Knowing Nothing*, 2021, and the Grand Prix for *All We Imagine as Light*, 2024), Shuchi Talati (Sundance 2024 Audience Award for *Girls Will Be Girls*), Varsha Bharath (Rotterdam 2025 NETPAC Award for *Bad Girl*), and Diwa Shah (San Sebastián 2023 Kutxabank New Directors Award for *Bahadur - The Brave*).

Interestingly, two of these feted titles have had the backing of filmmakers known for their adrenaline-fuelled, hyper-masculine films. Anurag Kashyap is a presenter for *Songs of Forgotten Trees*, while Vetri Maaran has produced the Tamil IFFR title *Bad Girl*. Roy views this in a positive light. "All seven producers of my film are men," she says. "Ranjan Singh, who has been backing unconventional stories for a decade now, was with *Songs of Forgotten Trees* from the very beginning. He gave me a free hand. 'It is a personal film, and you do what you feel is right,' he told me."

It was Singh who brought Kashyap on board, says Roy. Each of the other producers – Romil Mody, involved with films like *All We Imagine as Light* and *Laapata Ladies*; Navin Shetty; Sharib Khan; Vikas Kumar; and Bibhanshu Rai, a friend who has been with her since her short film *Run to the River* (2023) – has been a huge support, she adds.

Making history Stills from *Songs of Forgotten Trees*; and (below) filmmaker Anuparna Roy with her award. (GETTY IMAGES AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

After hours of an IT professional

The English literature graduate from Burdwan University's Kulti Government College arrived in Mumbai at the end of 2021, armed with a corporate job after an aborted shot at a mass communications degree. "I erroneously thought mass communication would have something to do with filmmaking," she says.

Roy started writing *Songs of Forgotten Trees* in early 2022. "Since I now had a job in Mumbai, I knew I would get an apartment. The moment I found the right one, I decided to make the film. It took us a year to figure out if it would be feasible to shoot in the residential society. We began filming at the end of 2023."

Shot secretly inside the apartment, the film revolves around an aspiring actor Thooya (Naaz Shaikh, who has been Roy's close friend for about six years), who does sex work to pay her bills. Thooya sublets the flat – which belongs to her "sugar daddy," who is also her main client – to an IT sales executive, Shweta (Sumi Baghel). In a story exploring themes of remembering and forgetting, alienation and assertion, the two women develop a bond that helps them shut out the noise around them.

The two migrant women barely speak, but their relationship is cemented not only by the space they share but also by their gradual understanding of each other's inner thoughts, compulsions, and misgivings as they begin to surface. "We had a workshop for three months. The three of us lived in the apartment to understand the complexities of the characters and of new-age relationships," says Roy.

Threaded with personal stories

"The essence was to bring out the memory of Jhuma Nath, my very first childhood friend," she explains. "My father did not like my friendship with her because she was Dalit. I was in Class V when Jhuma got married at 13 and then vanished forever. That sense of loss stayed with me. That is reflected in the film."

The song in the film is a lullaby that Naaz's mother used to sing to her. It was incorporated as an aural leitmotif (short, recurring musical phrase tied to a particular person, place, or idea). "It is associated with the good memories of her mother that the character played by Naaz wants to reconnect with," says Roy. "A lot of Purulia will always be inside me. I still talk in my own language, which is very different from the Bangla spoken by elite Bengalis."

She never misses an opportunity to visit her native place. "I make sure I go to my maternal grandmother's home. The house is still there, but nobody lives there anymore. I see the poverty around me. People around Noapara are still a suppressed lot. They are tribals deprived of a great deal," she says.

Roy plans to make a film set in British-era Bengal that will talk about the real people of the area. "I know my film will not change their lives or liberate them from the bane of casteism, but I still want to make it," she says. "It will be about something that diverges from general notions of nationalism and freedom, and look at their lives through an alternative prism."

Lessons from James Joyce

It was not so much cinema as literature that sowed in her the seeds of desire to tell stories and make films. "James Joyce's abstract works, especially *Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man*, inspired me," says Roy. "I did not understand everything back then. So, I read and re-read to get a real sense of what Joyce was doing. I read *The Dubliners* and all his other books more than once. They left a lasting impression on me."

Roy is now working on another Mumbai-set film that will be nothing like *Songs of Forgotten Trees*. "It will be fast-paced, moody, quirky, and about people on the city's margins. It will be an experiment," she says.

The writer is a New Delhi-based film critic.

GREEN HUMOUR

Rohan Chakravarty

Remembering a legend Giorgio Armani examines drawings for new designs in the late '70s; the late designer during the Giorgio Armani Privé Fall/Winter 2022-2023 show at Paris Fashion Week; on the sets of *Casino* and *American Gigolo*; and the Armani store in Rome closed for mourning. (GETTY IMAGES, INSTAGRAM, AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

TRIBUTE | GIORGIO ARMANI (1934-2025)

MASTER OF SUBTRACTION

Much before quiet luxury became a buzzword, Armani was producing it. Looking back at the designer who never chased trends but believed in his vision

Tarun Tahiliani

Last Wednesday, while packing for a flight to Dubai, I tossed the *Financial Times* magazine into my bag as something to read on the plane. It turned out to be the *FT* Sunday magazine, Italian fashion designer Giorgio Armani looking back at me from the cover. A day later, in the middle of a photoshoot, the news flashed that Armani had passed away, at 91. A chill rushed through my body. I had just read his cover story the night before. Somehow, it felt like even his timing in death was immaculate. On the cover one week, gone the next. It felt like a finale only he could have orchestrated, with the same precision that marked his career.

The obituaries that followed over the next couple of days were familiar: the wartime childhood, the medical school that did not engage him, his years of work as a window dresser, and then at fashion house Cerruti, before he struck out on his own to build one of the world's most successful independent fashion empires. The labels were also predictable but accurate: "perfectionist", "control freak", "a man of unflinching discipline". All true, of course, but was that the legacy he left behind?

'Clothing for movement and life'

My first memory of Armani as a label was as a dishwashing student in New York in the '80s, when I fished out a pair of trousers out of a clearance rack at Bloomingdale's. I did not know his name then. I bought the trousers because they were affordable and felt amazing, and I still have them. I no longer fit into them, but some things refuse to be discarded. That is what made his clothes special. Armani made clothes that endured. They did not lose their relevance even after they stopped being worn.

His genius, I think, was in subtraction. What Chanel did for women is what he did for men. Chanel freed women from corsets, and Armani freed men from their rigid suits. He softened the armour of the men's suit, stripped away the padding, and let his fabrics mould to the body. Ease and comfort were the mantra. For women, he created tailoring that was strong and feminine, a balance that never felt forced. What he offered was not fashion as costume, but clothing for movement and life.

What Chanel did for women is what he did for men. Chanel freed women from corsets, and Armani freed men from their rigid suits. He softened the armour of the men's suit, stripped away the padding, and let his fabrics mould to the body

Much before "quiet luxury" became the buzzword, Armani was producing it. When I walk on the streets of Milan and see the walls, cobblestones, and colours, I know exactly where his palette of beiges, greys, and charcoals came from. Critics have accused him of repetition, but I wager they may have missed the point. He was not chasing trends. He was insisting on his vision, season after season. In a culture obsessed with novelty, his steadiness was rather radical. A vision where there are few.

He also understood the theatre of pop culture. Actor Richard Gere in *American Gigolo* (1980) turned him into an international name, and Hollywood embraced his vision. Yet he never let marketing eclipse his values of comfort, quality, and timelessness. We do not know Armani today through his celebrity endorsements; we know him through his clothes. He seemed to have known that his work would outlive the noise.

'He created the trends'

For those of us designers in India, I think there are lessons here. Our fashion has thrived on an excess of embroidery, layering, and opulence. It is exuberant, but can often get overwhelming in the modern milieu. The modern Indian man can move from a Mughalesque *sherwani* one evening to a black tuxedo the next, and both may look good on him. But after 79 years of independence, perhaps as designers, we need to ask ourselves what our singular voice is.

It is not a coincidence that today it is difficult to differentiate several designers' work from one another. Armani's Italy had Versace's flamboyance, Dolce & Gabbana's drama, and still he was able to carve out his own territory with restraint. Not to forget Valentino, and many other amazing voices from luxury brands Marni to Miu Miu. Never once did he deviate from his true essence to meet market trends. And in doing so, he created the trends.

When I think of the Armani pieces I bought as a student, the first trousers from the '80s, I wonder if a student were to buy them today, would they wear them in 2025? That ease of design he had to create something 40 years ago, that authenticity which continued until his death, is a lesson in branding. His clothes endure not because they announce themselves, but because they whisper. That is Armani's legacy: style that does not demand attention, but holds it quietly. For Indian designers, including me, his life is a reminder that vision is not futile, clarity is not arrogance, and restraint is not compromise. They are all strengths. This really represents the passing of an era.

The writer is an Indian couturier renowned for his embroideries, drapes, and corsets.

Transforming lives Safeena Husain.
(SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

PERSON OF INTEREST

SAFEENA HUSAIN: BRINGING GIRLS BACK

The Ramon Magsaysay Award is acknowledgment of Husain's work

Safeena Husain, 54, was with a group of teenagers celebrating a learning milestone in a small village outside Udaipur, Rajasthan, when she asked one of them why her education had been interrupted. The girl had passed her Class X with Pragati, a second chance programme offered by Husain's award-winning non-profit Educate Girls. Pragati was designed for older girls who are ineligible for formal schooling. "I'm 18," she told Husain. "I left education 10 years ago when I was married."

Husain has just won the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award (the first for an Indian organisation) for her nearly two decade old labour of love. She almost didn't answer the frantic messages she received from an unknown Philippines number on a recent Sunday, asking for "some data and information", because "I thought it was a fraud".

Husain empathises with the younger woman's struggle because today she is one of those rare people who are able to channel their childhood trauma to transform society. Now in celebration mode, she would rather not talk about the difficult days, saying only that it was a "very turbulent" childhood in Delhi. School was always her "place of happiness" and where she felt safe. "Walking home from the bus stop was always the toughest time of day for me," she says.

Paradigm shift

Husain's education was interrupted for three years after Class XII. "Everybody gives up on you, they say 'marry her off', there's a divorcee with four kids..." She grappled with that classic triumvirate of guilt, shame, failure until an aunt, a friend from Lucknow University where her interfaith parents met and fell in love, took her home to live with her and changed Husain's life. "She gave me a lot of love, affection and the motivation to go back to education." Husain eventually graduated with a degree in economics history from the London School of Economics. "I still remember standing on Houghton Street," she says, referring to the school's location. "The way I saw myself shifted that day and how the world saw me shifted that day." Education transformed her life and she wants all girls to know that feeling.

Most girls know education is the only way to get ahead, Husain says. Like the woman who completed her schooling nearly two decades after she left school – and in the same year as her son, scoring more than him. Or the Bhil girls who are the first in their families to get a formal education. And the young woman who left a bad marriage and doesn't want to unload vegetables at 3 a.m. for the rest of her life.

Husain came back to India in 2005 and started Educate Girls two years later. The non-profit works in about 30,000 villages (mainly in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar). "We have brought over two million girls back into school," she says. "An equal number have gone through our learning programme, which is the foundational literacy and numeracy programme."

Push for second chances

Some 30,000 girls have graduated from the Pragati programme. "Right now a lot of energy is going into expanding the second chance programme and also taking it to other states," Husain says. "Because that's a huge problem, much more rampant than elementary school issues for out-of-school girls."

Societal and systemic issues can weave an impenetrable wall around girls, forcing them to drop out after the eighth grade. Marriage, household duties and mobility restrictions all become barriers to further education. "For every 100 primary schools, you have 40 middle schools, and 24 secondary schools, which means the distance to school increases and access drops off," Husain adds.

Those who do stay, face a lot of pressure. "I see a lot of girls approach secondary school with an enormous amount of fear. They have this sword hanging over the head with their parents saying. 'I'm sending you but if you fail, I'm going to make you sit at home or get you married off'," she says. "It leads to a lot of anxiety."

Husain works with state governments and says she's seen big changes in two decades – from separate toilets for girls to even a campaign such as 'Beti Bachao' that acknowledges there is a problem. "You know, the right to education came after we started work," she says. "So I have seen the struggle, but I have also seen how rapidly progress has happened. I think one must acknowledge that as well because that's the only thing that gives you hope to continue." Rajasthan's comprehensive free secondary education programme for girls has also been a game changer.

Husain's also seen attitudes come full circle. One father who, many years ago, was against sending his daughter to school recently told her: "You have to educate girls. The world is built for the educated and if we are not educated, we will be exploited like animals."

Family matters

Like her parents, Husain had an interfaith marriage. She met director Hansal Mehta when she organised a Bollywood dinner for author and Booker Prize winner Daisy Rockwell in Berkeley University. Her father Yusuf, who ran a travel company, was by then an actor in Hindi cinema, and connected her to her favourite director whose 2000 film *Dil Pe Mat Le Yaar* she had loved.

"We've just been together since," she says. "It was one of those things, you meet and you know it's meant to be." The couple lived together for years and have two daughters, eventually only marrying in 2022. "Losing my father during COVID was a big moment," she says. "It made us feel like we needed to do something more affirmative for ourselves and for our children."

Her daughters navigate their parents' very different worlds adroitly. When she was driving through Uttar Pradesh many years ago with one of her daughters, they spotted a line of girls carrying firewood and walking in a single file on the highway. Her daughter immediately piped up: "Why isn't Educate Girls helping them?"

***Priya Ramani** is a Bengaluru-based journalist and the co-founder of India Love Project on Instagram.*

GOREN BRIDGE

Careful play

Neither vulnerable, South deals

Bob Jones

Today's deal is from a recent tournament in Turkey. South was Turkey's Ismail Kandemir. His fourlevel opening was on the aggressive side, but he was rewarded with a wonderful dummy. 10 tricks looked easy, provided he could pick up the spades without a loser, and there might be an overtrick available from the club suit.

Despite the rosy outlook, Kandemir played the hand very carefully.

He won the opening heart lead with dummy's ace and made the far-sighted play of ruffing a heart at trick two. The ace of spades brought the disappointing news that he had a trump loser, but he could still make his contract if West held the ace of clubs. His careful play continued when he decided to eliminate both red suits from both hands before leading a club. A diamond to the ace was followed by a ruff of dummy's last heart. Kandemir led a diamond to the king and ruffed dummy's remaining diamond. He cashed the king of spades and now, his set-up complete, led a club, inserting the 10 from dummy when West played low. East won with the jack, but had the unhappy choice of yielding a ruff-sluff or giving dummy the king of clubs. 10 tricks either way after a well-played deal.

NORTH
♠ 5 4 2
♡ A J 8
◇ A K 4
♣ K 10 4 3

WEST
♠ Q 9 8
♡ K 10 9
◇ Q 9 8 6
♣ 8 7 5

EAST
♠ Void
♡ Q 7 5 4 3 2
◇ J 10 7 5
♣ A Q J

SOUTH
♠ A K J 10 7 6 3
♡ 6
◇ 3 2
♣ 9 6 2

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
4♠	All pass		

Opening lead: 10 of ♡

QUIZ

Easy like Sunday morning

All about national anthems

'Wilhelmus', the anthem of the Netherlands, is the oldest in the world, dating back to 1572.
(GETTY IMAGES)

Berty Ashley

1 On September 14, 1814, Francis Scott Key witnessed the attack on Fort McHenry from a ship in Baltimore and wrote the poem *Defence of Fort M'Henry*. He wrote about the large flag with 15 stars and stripes, and the "rockets' red glare" and "bombs bursting in air". This eventually became the national anthem of which country?

2 'Namo Namo Matha' was a song composed by Ananda Samarakoon, which in 1951, became the national anthem of this country. The lyrics were inspired by a Bengali poet under whom he had studied in Santiniketan and was responsible for the national anthems of India and Bangladesh. Which country and who was this poet?

3 The tune for the national anthem of this country comes from a very popular song called 'Terang Bulan'. When its Sultan went to London for the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902, he was asked to provide the anthem. Not wanting to disclose that they didn't have one, he hummed the tune, and eventually it became the official melody. Which country's anthem is this, now known as 'Negaraku'?

4 In 1853, this country held a competition to find out who could write the most inspiring poem, which could be the lyrics for their national anthem. Francisco Bocanega's girlfriend was convinced he was the right person to do so, contrary to his own beliefs. So, she locked him in a room filled with historical pictures till he slid a poem under the door. Which country's 'himno nacional' is this?

5 'Wilhelmus', the anthem of the Netherlands, is the oldest in the world, dating back to 1572. It tells the story of Willam van Nassau, the Dutch leader and 'Father of the Nation'. If the anthem has 15 stanzas, how does it pay tribute to him?

6 The national anthem of Andorra is unique in the way it tells the story of the nation's founding. The English translation starts, "The great Charlemagne, my Father, liberated me from the Saracens." This gives the anthem what unique characteristic among all the anthems?

7 When this Central European country was formed in 1918, the national anthem was created combining one verse from an opera called *Fidlovačka* and another verse from a folk song 'Kopala studienku'. When the country was split in two in 1993, the anthem was split as well, and each country retained its line as its national anthem. Which two countries are these?

8 The national anthem of this country was written after the declaration of war against Austria in 1792, hence it refers to blood-soaked flags and fighting bloodthirsty soldiers. Which country's anthem is this, whose evocative melody appears in a lot of popular culture?

9 There are only four national anthems with a peculiar characteristic. Kosovo, San Marino, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and the most famous country whose anthem is called 'Martha Real'. They produce a lot of sports champions who, upon winning, do not behave as others normally do. Which country and what is different about these?

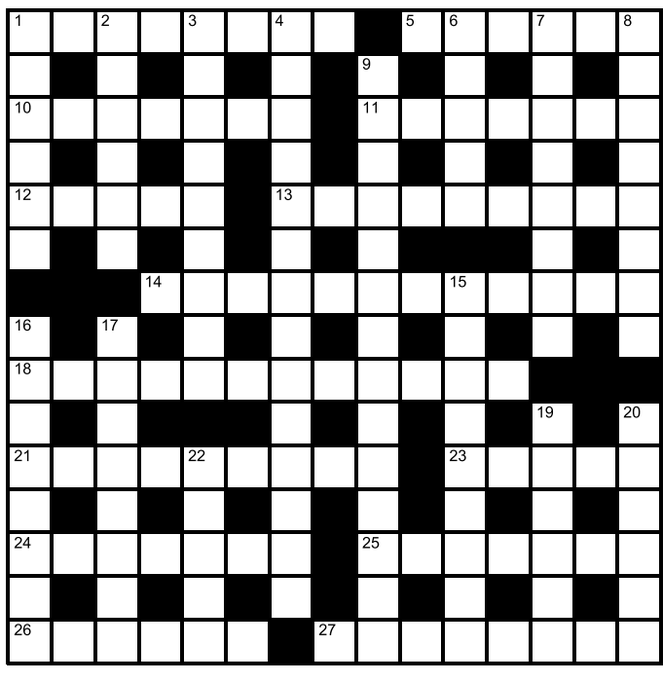
10 The national anthem of this country was adopted in 1997 and is the only one in the world that is written in five different languages. Which country is this if four of those languages are Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho and English?

A molecular biologist from Madurai, our quizmaster enjoys trivia and music, and is working on a rock ballad called 'Coffee is a Drink, Kaapi is an Emotion'. @bertyashley

Answers

1. The U.S.
2. Sri Lanka, Rabindranath Tagore
3. Malaysia
4. Mexico
5. An acrostic. The first letters of each stanza spell out his name.
6. Told in first person
7. Czech Republic and Slovakia
8. France
9. Spain; and no words, it is completely instrumental
10. South Africa (Afrikaans being the fifth language)

THE HINDU SUNDAY CROSSWORD #21 (Set by Dr. X)



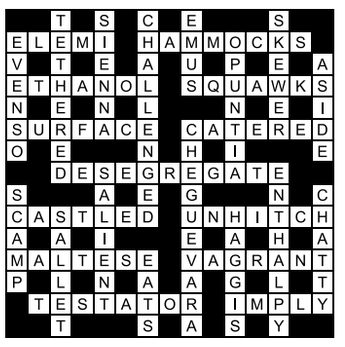
Across

1 Guy gets extremely sick after knocking back drink in Russian city (8)
5 Boy and girl start to explore a city in Tanzania (6)
10 Help son with renovation of tavern (7)
11 Criticise a member beginning to blunder in final (7)
12 General holding long gun (5)
13 Worthless criminal turned to tackle a judge (2-7)
14 Bored couple drinking gin finally relaxed (12)
18 Danger of UFOs? Surprisingly unprepared (3,4,5)
21 On second thought, article on angina's incorrect (4,5)
23 Worm behind large shelf (5)
24 Enthralled by guy at premiere, very muscular (7)
25 Stifled by diva in estate, most arrogant (7)
26 Delayed by boy picking up breakfast food in retreat (6)
27 English seaside resort is close to pub? Absolutely (8)

Down

1 Blunder inviting extremely rude, revolting cheapskates (6)
2 Make less dense starter of aloo in new fryer (6)
3 Greek king's soon having fun with maiden (9)
4 Fail to applaud? Take no action (3,2,4,5)
6 Immense chapter covered is relating to the sense of smell (5)
7 Fellow's worried after popping a drug (8)
8 Faculty is feeling a little pressed for time (8)
9 Novel enraptures! Love to continue reading (6,4,4)
15 Entering awfully long line outside entrance to racecourse (9)
16 Wine with posh girl in European country (8)
17 Suggesting to kill group smuggling ecstasy (8)
19 Approach a crater over mouth of volcano (6)
20 Groom had a meal after end of function (6)
22 Plenty of maple nuts (5)

SOLUTION NO. 20



In the land of the whirling dervishes

Behind those spinning figures lies a centuries-old practice rooted in discipline and surrender that is part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

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While watching the 2008 movie *Jodhaa Akbar*, I could not grasp the choreography accompanying the Sufi song *Khwaja mere Khwaja*. Years later, in Istanbul, I attended a cultural performance that seemed familiar. Men clad in white robes (*tennure*), tall hats (*sikke*), and black cloaks (*hirka*) entered the hall with their hands crossed over the chest.

As the melody of the *ney* flute filled the air, they began to whirl in a slow, graceful motion in an anticlockwise direction. Their heads were tilted as if listening to the divine, right hands raised to receive God's grace, and left hands lowered to share with earth, as if becoming a conduit between God and creation. At that moment, I learnt that the Hindi movie featured whirling dervishes. What at first seemed like a stylised dance in a movie turned out to be a centuries-old spiritual Sufi practice known as the *Sema* ceremony.

The origin of the art has a close connection with the poet Jalal al-Din Muammad Rumi, popularly known as Rumi. The whirling dervishes belong to the Mevlevi Order, a mystical branch of Islam founded in the 13th century by Rumi's followers after his death in 1273. Rumi, born in 1207 in present-day Afghanistan, had fled with his family to Konya in what is now Turkiye in the early 13th century to escape Mongol invasions. Each December, on the death anniversary of Rumi, Konya hosts the whirling dervishes festival, a week-long celebration of Rumi's legacy, drawing pilgrims and tourists to witness the *Sema* ceremony. Rumi's mausoleum in Konya has become home to the Mevlevi order.

The ceremony is derived from the Arabic word *Sama'a*, which means "to listen". Legend has it that while passing through a bazaar, Rumi heard the rhythmic pounding by gold beaters. Overwhelmed by spiritual ecstasy, he began whirling with the rhythm, giving birth to the *Sema*. This ceremony unfolds in seven parts as a journey from acknowledging the creator to experiencing unity with the divine.

In fact, even the attire is symbolic: the *sikke* represents the tombstone of the ego; the white *tennure* signifies a burial shroud, symbolising death of the ego and worldly desires; and the black *hirka* represents worldly attachments. The whirling itself mirrors the cosmic dance of planets, with the ceremony's final stage featuring a sheikh standing at the centre assuming the place of the sun in the centre.

The Mevlevi dervishes used to undergo a 1,001-day apprenticeship in a Sufi lodge (*tekke*) to learn about music, poetry, whirling, philosophy and so on. However, the *Sema* ritual had been primarily performed by men in its formalised practice during the early centuries, though Rumi's teachings emphasise inclusivity.

In contemporary times, especially since the 20th century, Sema has become more inclusive with women increasingly participating as whirling dervishes, reflecting evolving gender norms.

In 2005, UNESCO recognised the *Sema* ceremony as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This 800-year-old-tradition is taught at many universities to preserve its rich history. To perpetuate Rumi's legacy, the Mevlana International Foundation was created in Konya in 1996. *Sema* performances are held globally, and miniature figurines of dervishes are sold as cherished souvenirs for tourists.

Silence is a potent trait

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Silence is not merely the lack of noise; it embodies the presence of comprehension and respect for community. Silence carries deep meaning. Indeed, it serves as a refuge where thoughts can settle and clarity arises. In a world fixated on opinions and responses, silence gracefully provides reflection, tranquillity, and inner resilience. It resonates more profoundly than speech when emotions are both uplifting and difficult, enabling us to genuinely hear others and ourselves. Being silent is a skill; it reflects the ability to manage and discipline oneself.

In a loud world where individuals often speak without purpose, silence emerges as a potent and uncommon phenomenon. It doesn't hasten to clarify or validate anything; rather, it remains unwavering like a tranquil river that understands its destination. While meaningless words can muddle thoughts and quickly obscure the truth, silence offers insightful transparency and great clarity. It listens with serenity when others dispute, observes softly when fingers are pointed, and fosters harmony where words would merely create chaos. It is a formidable tool and should be wielded with care.

Sometimes, the most truthful thing you can express is to say nothing at all. True strength lies not in how vocally you assert yourself, but in maintaining calmness when others expect you to speak. One requires silence during times of heightened emotions, as words uttered in anger often cause more pain than aimed for. One needs to be quiet when seeing suffering, as simply being there is often more healing than giving advice. One needs silence when lacking the complete context because making assumptions can be more damaging than beneficial. And stillness is needed when words are intended only to prevail, not to seek understanding. In those instances, silence is not a sign of weakness – it's a sign of wisdom.

Whether in professional or personal space, silence holds more value than empty chatter. Learn to remain silent when you lack complete and clear information. Hold your tongue if your words might be misinterpreted. Stay quiet when you are in a judgmental mindset. Keep silent if what you say could hurt a friendship. Pause amid anger. Don't speak if you can't express it without raising voice. Refrain from speaking if your words can offend someone.

When employment is not empowerment

Many women in India are underemployed, technically working but without the dignity, scope, or opportunities their education deserves

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India celebrates rising female literacy and record numbers of women entering higher education. Yet, many women, mostly in small towns, are employed in jobs that do not give full play to their potential, while some others do not work at all. The paradox is striking: the country produces educated women, but fails to use their potential.

So a large number of women are underemployed – technically working, but without the dignity, scope, or opportunities their education deserves. Its roots lie in the motherhood penalty, career breaks, topographical limitations, and most persistent, societal expectations. It is not only an economic problem but a woman-specific one too. At its core, underemployment reflects how traditional gender roles still dictate a countless number of women's lives.

Recent Periodic Labour Force Survey data show that women's employment rate grew from 22% in 2017-18 to 40.3% in 2023-24. Yet, employment statistics are misleading: they measure quantity and not quality. A Ph.D. holder working as a clerk or an MBA graduate tutoring a few middle-school children both count as "employed". However, these numbers conceal

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underemployment. The consequences of underemployment are vast, from psychological to economical. India invests in education but is not able to give jobs to women on the basis of their potential and qualifications. McKinsey estimates that India could add $770 billion to its GDP by closing gender employment gaps. These gaps can be closed by ensuring that more women join the workforce and those already working are fully and fairly employed.

My research, "Impact of underemployment on women's mental well-being", presented at the 29th international and 60th national conference of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology, shows that two-thirds of underemployed women experience lower well-being than unemployed women. Sufficiently employed women report good well-being consistently. This shows how the quality of a job can make a huge difference. Underemployment leads to lower self-esteem, chronic stress, and identity loss. In corporate India, women are three times more likely to reach out for mental health support than men, a testament to the psychological toll underemployment has on them. Many women I interviewed reported feeling undervalued, underappreciated and even inferior to their male colleagues.

The Time Use Survey, 2024 from the Union Ministry of Statistics shows that women in the 15-59 age group spend approximately four hours and 50 minutes a day on unpaid domestic work – three hours more than men, who average about 88 minutes.

Short cuts may not be the best route

Bypassing norms for quick gain compromises ethical, moral values

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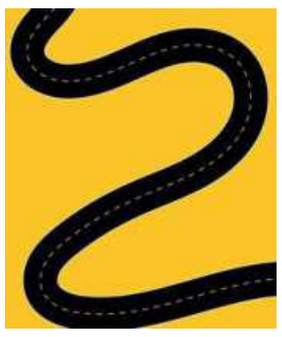
On critically analysing the root causes of scams, accidents, and unethical activities, one common reason stands out: people resorting to shortcuts involving corruption, unlawful acts, and greed without adhering to ethical norms, legal standards, or procedures.

Investigations into major scams reveal the cause to be greed to amass wealth, position, or fame in quick time. The culprits bypass legal processes and do not follow ethical principles, opting for shortcuts with an ulterior motive rather than following due diligence or standard procedures.

Similarly, most road accidents are a result of drivers violating traffic



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rules by speeding, reckless overtaking, or rash driving in a hurry. These shortcuts are taken at the cost of safety. Inquiries into flight and train accidents have revealed failure to follow signals and do preventive maintenance, and hasty, irresponsible decisions.

A deeper analysis of fire and industrial disasters shows that many occur owing to non-compliance with standard operating procedures, a lack of seriousness in preventive maintenance, or ignoring early-warning signals – all forms of neglect and shortcut-taking.

Even in academics, a few students, instead of working sincerely and meticulously, resort to unfair means violating academic integrity for better results.

In public life, many individuals attempt to bribe officials to bypass waiting periods and queues to obtain licences, passports, approvals, or certificates.

Similarly, in organisations, some employees seek promotions, transfers, or postings through unethical means. These, again, are examples of shortcuts.

While such actions might provide temporary gain, in the long run, they do not offer true satisfaction or peace of mind.

By resorting to shortcuts to achieve targets, gain personal benefit, or avoid hard work, individuals and organisations compromise ethical and moral values. This leads to a breakdown of financial integrity, academic integrity, and moral standards.

FEEDBACK

Letters to the *Magazine* can be e-mailed separately to mag.letters@thehindu.co.in by Tuesday 3 p.m.

Cover story

The article has delved deep into the *raison de etre* for the Toronto International Film Festival gaining in popularity, especially among Indian filmmakers. ('Why Indian filmmakers love TIFF'; Sept. 7) A screening at TIFF not only enhances the reputation of filmmakers but also provides them a platform to screen their films at other international film festivals as well and perhaps even vie for honours at the Oscars, Golden Globes and so on.
C.V. Aravind

Film festivals celebrate not only cinema but the very craft of storytelling. While innovative filmmaking techniques breathe life into imagination, prudent budgeting and timely completion of production ensure a film's viability. International film festivals like TIFF are serving as platforms to showcase talent, attract investors, and secure global recognition, while nurturing cross-cultural dialogue, and helping to raise the standards of world cinema.
N.S. Reddy

Debt trap

The article is very informative especially for those credit card users who swipe their cards beyond their repayment capacity and end up in huge debt traps. ('Swipe now, pay forever'; Sept. 7) Credit cards should be utilised only as a last resort of meeting unforeseen expenditure keeping well in mind income levels.
Katuru Durga prasad Rao

Credit card crisis is basically not only due to unplanned and impulsive spending, but also due to the easy availability of credit on tap and that too with an EMI repayment facility for bigger spends. Such imprudent spending using credit card, especially when one possesses multiple credit cards, usually leads to a default in repayment.
Kosaraju Chandramouli

Fight for dignity

The struggle of Prof. P. Senrayaperumal brings out the reality that institutional systems can be both heartless and painful. ('Fighting the system'; Sept. 7) What one fails to understand is that those who issue such orders lack an application of mind. One hopes the professor gets relief from the higher courts at the earliest.
B. Sundar Raman

P. Senrayaperumal's commitment and zeal for education serve as inspiration for all. Institutional apathy to injustice is a blemish on the Constitution. Caste-based discrimination is a scourge that undermines individual dignity and stunts social progress.
Anusha Pillay

Colonial wrongs

The most laudable activity of the Humboldt Forum is its extensive and transparent provenance research of objects. ('Loot, loss, and learning in Berlin'; Sept. 7) It aims, in the words of Prof. Lars-Christian Koch, "to find out where these objects came from and what they mean to the people (who originally owned them)". This is a rare departure from traditional museum practices. It is encouraging to learn that the forum is doing its best in "righting colonial wrongs".
N. Rama Rao

MORE ON THE WEB

www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page

Rethinking textbooks in India's classrooms
How culturally rooted bilingual education can prepare children for the Great Restructuring
Gisel Erumachadathu

Educating young voters
Spending hours on YouTube or Instagram to gain an awareness only panders to pre-existing beliefs
Nishuna Sugumar

The evergreen allure of used books
Just their sight and smell calm the mind
Rishabh Kochhar

A good run is all you need
Running is described as a sport, but it's a mental duel
Binit Semwal

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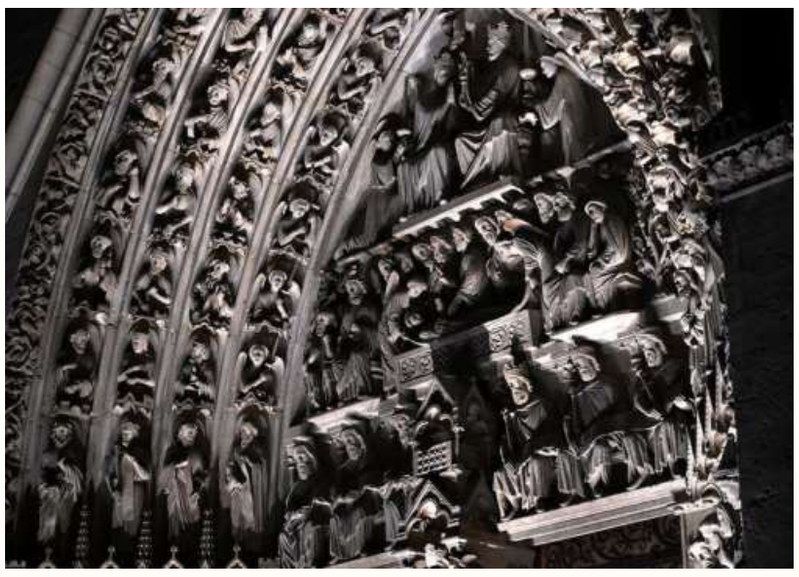


Towering presence
Notre Dame on the Île de la Cité, and its restored interiors.
(THULASI KAKKAT)

QUEUING UP FOR NOTRE DAME

The 860-year-old Paris cathedral is projected to welcome 12 million visitors this year. A resident of the city shares a tour and some insights

Biswamit Dwibedy

Notre Dame caught on fire just days after I accepted the offer to teach at The American University of Paris. Hence, for most of my Parisian years, the cathedral has been inaccessible. But that has never stopped it from attracting crowds. For years now, I have seen tourists line up along the river to take pictures of the scaffolded façade. I've walked past it a hundred times, but now that it was finally open, I decided it was time to pay a visit.

Notre Dame stands on the tip of an island, the Île de la Cité, the ancient heart of Paris. The Romans were here in 500 BC. Construction of the church began in 1163 under Maurice de Sully and ended a hundred years later, and there would be no major work until the French Revolution, when much of the bronze, lead, and precious metals were removed and melted down. Major restoration was done to the church in the mid-19th century. And in 2019, the fire happened.

I can't imagine what it must have felt like to look out your window and watch the cathedral burn. And what it must be like now, after years of construction, to watch it come back to life. The fire pushed the cathedral into another round of upkeep. To rebuild the historic roof called "Le foret" or the forest, 1,000 historic oak trees from 200 French forests were selected and sacrificed – a move that was sharply criticised. At the same time, artisans from all over France gathered to restore the cathedral, and continue to do so daily. During the time of writing this article, statues that belong up on the famous spire have been restored. On September 20, the Towers of Notre Dame, with its chimera gallery, will open to the public. And soon the wooden shafts on which the two bells, Emmanuel and Marie, are suspended will be replaced.

Place for everyone

Standing across from Notre Dame, one does get the sense of being in the centre of the historic city of Paris. To one side of the church, on the Left Bank of the river Seine, is the Latin Quarter, brimming with students, because it is home to one of the world's revered universities, the Sorbonne. Adjacent to Notre Dame is the Hotêl Dieu, one of the world's oldest hospitals.

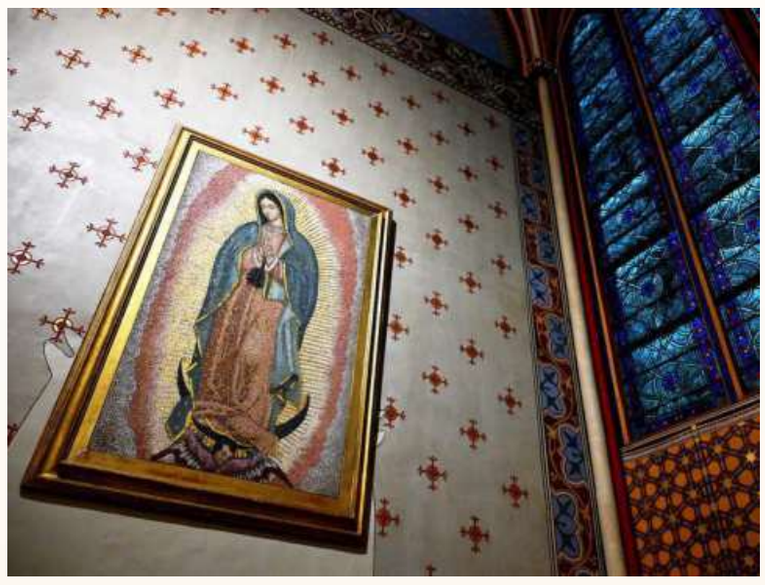
On the Right Bank is the Marais, the old Jewish neighbourhood, which is now Paris's gay district, dotted with bars, museums, and boutiques. The paved-in square in front of Notre Dame is roughly the size of a football field. It's a place for everyone from musicians to pickpockets to earn their livelihood. Here, dancers draw applause as they perform hip-hop routines. Tourists pose for photographs. Couples kiss amidst a cacophony of languages. And sporty French men and women jog across, oblivious to it all. It's a spot where the many sides of Paris converge.

On the day of my visit, I found a long line of extremely well-dressed people outside the doors to Notre Dame. Walking past them, I noticed almost everyone in that line spoke French. Families stood together – children, parents, and grandparents – just before dinner time. I joined the line and when a woman in a beautiful dress stood behind me, I asked her if I needed a reservation. Yes, she said. Especially for the concert. It was then that I realised that I won't be able to get in, because this wasn't a regular evening at Notre Dame.

Churches in Paris – as in the rest of the world – often double as musical venues. On that gorgeous Wednesday evening, it was *Requiem* by Mozart. The woman told me she used to come to the church with her mother, who had worshipped there often. As she grew older, she brought friends visiting from out of town to hear concerts. She hadn't returned since the fire. This evening, she was back – this time with her four-year-old – reviving a family tradition.

Bridging the past and the present

Since I couldn't enter the church that evening, I decided to return early one morning, just in time for Mass. There was barely a line, and inside, worshippers almost outnumbered the tourists. From the inside, you can catch the shadow of workers moving across the stained-glass windows because the renovation won't be complete until 2026. However, much of the outside has been restored to its previous glory, including the iconic spire and roof.

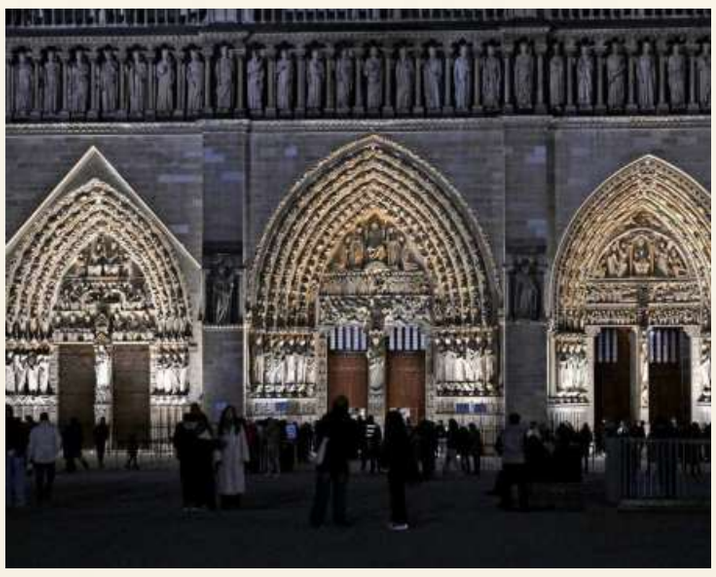


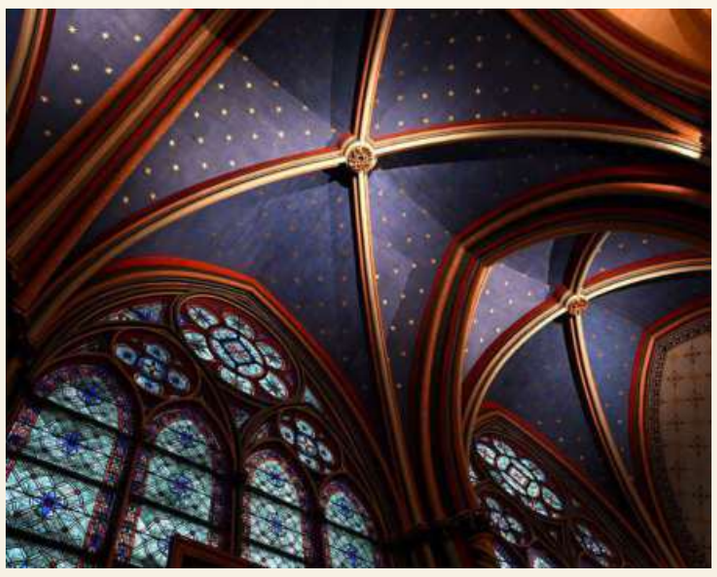
Inside, things look drastically different. During the renovation, a latex paste was applied to the walls, then peeled off once dried, lifting away centuries of soot and grime. Coupled with the brilliance of the stained glass, the effect is luminous. Now, the past and present exist together. You can buy candles at the click of a button, make donations with contactless payments.

Notre Dame is also a museum. While it famously houses the Crown of Thorns and Wood of the Cross, it is also home to paintings by 20th century masters such as Henri Matisse and George Braque, which stand in quiet dialogue with statues and religious paintings from centuries past.

On my way back from Mass that morning, I saw a much longer line just across the street – outside the Préfecture de Police – where hundreds of immigrants queue up each day to apply for residency permits. I've stood in that line more than once. And I wondered how many prayers have been whispered to the God inside by those who may never enter the cathedral. Many of them don't share its faith. But perhaps that's the magic of Notre Dame: it makes a convert of us all.

The writer teaches at The American University of Paris and is the author of Hundred Greatest Love Songs.





Looking for the Hunchback
Snapshots from the Notre Dame; and Victor Hugo's grand novel.
(THULASI KAKKAT)

A cathedral of memory and musings

From Victor Hugo's pages, discovered in a dingy library in Kerala, to the arches of the Notre Dame, a photojournalist reminisces

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Almost every Communist village of Kerala's northern Malabar has a Martyr's Column and a library. My village, Madikkai in Kasaragod, has a memorial for slain DYFI leader, comrade Bhaskara Kumbala, and a library built in memory of Communist revolutionary A.K. Gopalan. They say libraries played a significant role in shaping Kerala's reputation as an erudite State. And like many others, it is from one of these tiny, tiled-roof libraries that my world opened up.

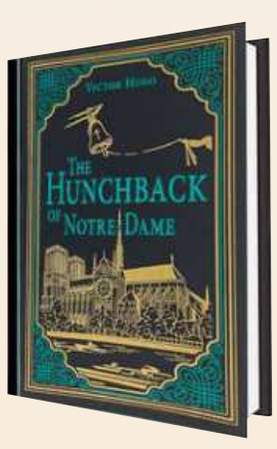
I first heard of Victor Hugo from an uncle one summer afternoon, while we were building castles with wet mud in a palm orchard. He said to us children: "All of you should definitely read Victor Hugo's *Pavangal* [*Les Miserables*]." That must have stayed on, for one evening I found myself at the library waiting for comrade Kottan, the librarian, to get there. He also had a job in a *beedi* company. As Kott*ettan* (brother Kottan, as I used to call him) came in, I eagerly asked about *Pavangal*. With a torch torch in hand, he led me through the book-lined shelves of the dimly-lit, sparsely furnished library. However, we could not find the book that day.

Instead, he handed me another one, Maxim Gorky's *Amma* (*Mother*). A few days later, Kott*ettan* told me he found the book I had been looking for. But it turned out to be another one by Hugo, *Notre Damile Koonan* (*The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*). And that was the beginning of an experience I cherish to this day. In that dingy library, I read about the famed winters of St. Petersburg, the medieval cathedrals of Paris, and the cobbled streets of ancient cities. I felt a deep sense of anemoia – a word the dictionary describes as nostalgia for a place one has never been to. In a village with only harsh summers, brooding rains and a mere whiff of spring, I yearned for the alleyways of strange cities, their biting winters, and golden wheat fields.

Leaning into the familiar

This January, on a particularly cold evening, while walking across a bridge over the Seine to the Notre-Dame de Paris, I felt a sense of familiarity – the memories of what I had read intertwining with real life.

It had only been weeks since the cathedral, which was shut for restoration following a fire in 2019, was reopened to the public. Overwhelmed, I felt an urge to shout



out to the tourists queuing to enter the cathedral that beneath the ground upon which they were standing, once upon a time, there had been 11 steps. I had read in *The Hunchback*... that the steps leading up to the cathedral had been destroyed by the repeated flooding of the Seine. As I stepped inside Notre Dame through the triple-arched entryway, I was struck by how much I remembered from the book. Did I hear someone call out "refuge" from behind the altar? Did I hear a faint Spanish lullaby from some secret chamber above? Or did I spot a lamb running through the maze of the visitors' feet?

Though I knew I wouldn't find it, I kept looking for a word. On the floors speckled with sunlight filtering in through the coloured glass windows, in the gloomy corners with giant sculptures, on the walls adorned with pictures – ANArKH. Hugo, in his preface to the novel, says he chanced upon this mysterious word, meaning fate in Greek, casually scribbled on one of Notre Dame's towers.

"... The man who wrote that word upon the wall disappeared from the midst of the generations of man many centuries ago; the word, in its turn, has been effaced from the wall of the church; the church will, perhaps, itself soon disappear from the face of the earth," he writes, also alluding to the state of disrepair the cathedral had fallen into in the early 19th century. *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* helped renew interest in the building and led to the efforts in its restoration.

Over 860 years old, the cathedral, a masterpiece of Gothic architecture, took 200 years and thousands of workers to build. Scores of artists and sculptors whose works it holds, the ordinary and the extraordinary people whose prayers and silences it has witnessed. Does this colossal monument know just how many lives have been linked to it in innumerable ways? Lives like mine?